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## WILDLIFE SERVICES—WYOMING

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### USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Wyoming

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Wyoming Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

A significant role of the Wyoming WS program is protecting domestic livestock from predators such as coyotes, red fox, mountain lions, black bears, and threatened or endangered species such as grizzly bears and wolves. WS' trained specialists accurately identify the cause of livestock damage and resolve the conflict in a way that minimizes impacts on wildlife. In addition, Wyoming WS is at the forefront of an effort to protect public health and safety from an outbreak of skunk rabies in east-central Wyoming. WS works with a variety of cooperators including airports, businesses, cities, counties, and individuals in both urban and rural settings to curtail or prevent wildlife damage to a variety of resources.

### Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this technical assistance can be provided over the phone. WS also



provides on-site expertise, or direct assistance, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts scientific research across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

**Protecting Livestock from Predators**—Agriculture ranks among the top three industries in Wyoming with an estimated economic impact of \$1.5 billion. Wyoming ranks eighth nationally in total land devoted to farms and ranches and ranks first in the average size of farms and ranches. The cattle industry in the State accounts for about 76 percent of all agricultural cash receipts. Wyoming ranks third in the Nation in production of stock sheep and second in wool production.

WS works with both the cattle and sheep industries to protect livestock from predators. Coyotes are the most significant predator and are responsible for 69 percent of sheep losses. However, increasing populations of black bears, grizzly bears, wolves, and mountain lions also contribute to increased incidents of livestock depredation. The Wyoming Agriculture Statistics Service reported that in 2001 Wyoming sheep producers lost 47,000 sheep and lambs, valued at \$2.25 million, to predators. Stock growers also lose significant numbers of new calves and some cows to predators. Wyoming produced 830,000 calves in 2000. The value of calves lost due to predation is estimated to be greater than \$3 million. Research has shown that without a professional, accountable wildlife damage management program in place, livestock losses could be 2 to 3 times greater.

WS, in cooperation with the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), 18 County Predatory

#### Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting livestock from statutory predators, primarily coyotes
- Participating on the Wyoming Animal Damage Management Board (ADMB) and associated wildlife enhancement projects
- Controlling skunk rabies in Wyoming
- Responding to wolf, grizzly bear, black bear, and cougar depredations
- Managing damage and threats caused by migratory and feral birds to airports, economic resources, and public health and safety

#### Top 5 WS Research Projects of Interest to Wyoming:

- Developing chemistry-based tools for wildlife damage management
- Focusing on adult territorial coyotes to manage sheep depredation
- Managing coyote predation through reproductive intervention strategies
- Managing predators through new methods to protect livestock and wildlife
- Developing an oral rabies vaccine and delivery systems targeting skunks

Animal Boards, and the Animal Damage Management Board, provides assistance to reduce losses. In June 1999, WS entered into an agreement with the WGFD to respond to all black bear, grizzly bear, and mountain lion livestock depredation complaints in a four-county area. The program had such positive results that the area was expanded in 2000 and again in 2001 to cover the entire State.

To reduce predation, WS uses an integrated approach, relying on both nonlethal and lethal methods to remove livestock predators. An analysis of producers' operations found that 100 percent of Wyoming livestock producers who cooperate with WS use nonlethal methods to protect their livestock. This reduces predator losses and minimizes the need for lethal control. While producer-employed nonlethal strategies vary, some producers utilize as many as 18 separate nonlethal techniques throughout the year. When damage occurs despite these efforts, WS removes the offending animals.

**Rabies**—Skunk rabies is a growing concern in eastern and central Wyoming, and the disease is now spreading to the southern and western portions of the State. Statewide there have been several cases of human exposure. In 2000, Wyoming reported 76 cases of animal rabies, primarily in skunks, but also in bats, cats, a horse, a cow, and a squirrel. Campbell County, the City of Gillette, and Weston County have partnered with WS to provide a rabies prevention program. Other counties are considering similar programs. Under the program, WS specialists respond to complaints from the public and local officials regarding skunks or other animals that are visibly sick. Skunks are trapped and euthanized so specimens can be collected for laboratory testing. In Campbell County, the confirmed rabies incidents have dropped from 27 in fiscal year (FY) 1997, to 10 during FY 1998, 6 during FY 1999, 11 in FY 2000 and 3 in FY 2001.

### Protecting Threatened and Endangered Species—

Experimentally reintroduced wolves in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem have shown a more than ten-fold increase in their numbers since they were first reintroduced to the area in 1995. The population has now surpassed goals for Federal delisting from an endangered species to a threatened species. In the last year, the wolf population in Wyoming has expanded from 226 to about 270 animals. WS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) work cooperatively to solve wolf depredation complaints. WS removes individual wolves at the direction of FWS when predation occurs. During FY 2002, WS investigated 65 incidents of wolf predation. These investigations determined 29 head of cattle and 4 dogs were

killed by wolves. In addition, 27 head of cattle were reported lost to wolves but wolf depredation could not be confirmed due to a lack of evidence. In response to these depredations, and at the request of the FWS Endangered Species Wolf program, 10 wolves were radio collared for further monitoring and 6 were removed. The efficient and professional management of problem wolves builds public support for their presence and promotes conservation of all wolves.

## Looking to the Future

Skunk rabies is spreading westward across the State of Wyoming. WS is receiving increased requests for assistance from counties that are just beginning to experience problems with this disease. WS is conducting field research associated with the development of methods to deliver oral rabies vaccines to skunks.

The continued expansion of wolf and grizzly bear populations from the National Parks and wilderness into livestock-production areas will result in increased conflicts with livestock and property, and greater threats to public health and safety. In addition to needing effective nonlethal techniques to address damage by these species, the use of rotary and fixed-wing aircraft for selective management comes at an increased cost to the program.

## Wyoming Wildlife Services Funding .....

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

